Psychological States Underlying Excellent Performance in Professional Golfers: "Letting it Happen" vs. "Making it Happen"

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Highlights

- Mixed-method data were collected from professional golfers' excellent performances
- Two distinct psychological states were reported to underlie these performances
- "Letting it happen" corresponded with the description and definition of flow
- "Making it happen" was more effortful and intense, and therefore different to flow
- Both states occurred through separate processes and goals, which are described

Abstract

Objectives: In this study we aimed to better understand the occurrence and experience of flow in elite golf. As flow is more likely to occur during peak performances, and for elite athletes, our objectives were to: (i) identify golfers who achieved exceptional performances (e.g., winning a professional tournament), and (ii) explore if and how they experienced flow within that performance.

Design: Mixed-method multiple case study.

Method: Participants were 10 professional golfers (*M* age = 30; *SD* = 9.9). Performance data and participant observations informed semi-structured interviews which took place as soon as possible after an excellent performance (*M* = 4 days). Data were interpreted inductively using within-case then cross-case analysis.

Results: These golfers reported that they experienced two different psychological states during their excellent performances. These states were described as “letting it happen” which corresponded with the definition and description of flow, and “making it happen” which was more effortful and intense, involving a heightened awareness of the situation and therefore differing to flow. Both states occurred through different processes, and “letting it happen” was a relatively gradual build-up of confidence, whereas “making it happen” was a more sudden stepping-up of concentration and effort.

Conclusion: These findings are discussed in relation to existing literature on flow and related optimal psychological states in sport. Recommendations are then made for future research into the experience and occurrence of both states reported in this study.

Keywords: clutch performance; elite athletes; flow; peak performance.

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Positive psychology emphasises the study of optimal human functioning, with key themes including the fostering of excellence, exceptional performance, and positive subjective experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Indeed, a primary goal for many sport psychology practitioners and coaches is to help athletes achieve optimal levels of performance, and to do so more consistently (Harmison, 2011). One valued subjective experience of particular interest to positive psychologists is flow: a harmonious and intrinsically rewarding state characterized by intense focus and absorption in a specific activity, to the exclusion of irrelevant thoughts and emotions, and a sense of everything coming together or clicking into place, even in challenging situations (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Flow has frequently been associated with a range of positive outcomes such as elevations in well-being (Haworth, 1993), self-concept (Jackson, Thomas, Marsh & Smethurst, 2001), and peak performance (Jackson & Roberts, 1992). This intersection of peak experience and peak performance means that flow is extremely relevant, and highly sought after, in sport. Therefore, understanding the nature of flow and its occurrence has great potential for athletes, coaches, practitioners, and researchers, for example, in terms of how these states may be experienced more often. In this study we aimed to better understand the occurrence and experience of flow in elite golf by interviewing players within a week of an exceptional performance (e.g., winning a professional tournament) to obtain more recent, specific, and detailed data of these optimal states.

Flow States in Sport

Current understanding of flow in sport is commonly derived from Csikszentmihalyi's (2002) conceptualisation of the experience as nine dimensions. Three dimensions are proposed to be conditions through which the experience occurs (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002), namely: *challenge-skill balance* (a balance between high perceived skills and demands in the situation); *clear goals* so that one knows exactly what to do during

the performance; and *unambiguous feedback* about the progress that is being made. The other six dimensions are suggested to be characteristics which describe what the experience is like (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002): *action-awareness merging* (deep involvement leads to automaticity and spontaneity)*; concentration on the task at hand* (complete focusing of attention)*; loss of self-consciousness* (concern for the self disappears and the individual becomes absorbed in the activity); *sense of control* (e.g., over the performance); *time transformation* (i.e., either slowing down or speeding up); and *autotelic experience* (the experience is perceived as enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding).

However, despite over 20 years of research in sport, these experiences remain elusive, rare, and unpredictable (e.g., Chavez, 2008). Indeed, flow has been described as one of the least understood phenomena in sport (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). As a result, there have been calls for better understanding and explanation of flow in order to help athletes achieve its performance-based and psychological rewards (Author 1 et al, 2012, in press).

A range of quantitative (e.g., Koehn, Morris, & Watt, 2013) and qualitative (e.g., Chavez, 2008) studies have investigated how flow occurs in sport (see Swann, Keegan, Piggott & Crust, 2012 for a review). In particular, qualitative methods (i.e., semi-structured interviews) have been used to gain rich descriptions and insights into athletes' perceptions regarding the factors involved in flow occurrence. Ten factors have been identified as facilitating, preventing, and disrupting flow across a range of sports: focus, preparation, motivation, arousal, thoughts and emotions, confidence, environmental and situational conditions, feedback, performance, and team play and interaction (see Author 1 et al., 2012a). In their positive form, these factors facilitate flow. However, if they are absent (e.g., preparation) or inappropriate (e.g., arousal, focus), they can prevent the experience. Further, if certain factors develop in their negative form (e.g., inappropriate focus, loss of confidence) during the experience, then flow can be disrupted. While this approach has yielded important insights

into factors influencing flow, most understanding of how flow occurs in sport is based upon associations rather than explanation (Author 1 et al, in press).

To date, these qualitative studies have mainly employed career-based interviews which seek the athlete's general understanding and awareness of flow throughout their career. While such interviews can obtain rich descriptions, this method has been criticised because it relies on memory of events which may have occurred years in the past (cf. Jackson & Kimiecik, 2008). The career-based nature of these interviews means that athletes' accounts can be subject to forgetting details (Yarrow, Campbell & Burton, 1970) or biased recall of their experiences (e.g., the 'rose-tinted glasses' effect; Brewer, Van Raalte, Under, & Van Raalte, 1991).

In response to the limitations of career-based interviews, researchers identified the need to develop methods that can capture more detailed, recent, and trustworthy description of participants' mental states in order to enhance the possibility of generating important information about these experiences (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). The Experience Sampling Method (ESM; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987) was developed to collect 'experience-near' data of flow, that is, data collected in real-time or soon after the experience. Although the ESM has been employed successfully in other domains (e.g., Hektner, Schmidt & Csikszentmihalyi, 2007), it has limited practicality in most sports - especially in competition (see Jackson & Kimiecik, 2008). Questionnaires have also been used to capture recent data on flow, such as the Flow State Scale-2 which is designed to be administered soon after a performance, and Dispositional Flow Scale-2 which measures the frequency with which athletes experience flow (Jackson & Eklund, 2004). While this approach has been used extensively, such questionnaires lack the rich, detailed data that interviews can provide – especially regarding *how* flow occurs in specific performances. Conversely, in a leisure context, Houge Mackenzie, Hodge and Boyes (2011) obtained recent

data on flow by conducting stimulated-recall interviews using footage obtained from head mounted cameras during river surfing. Although it is not possible to use head mounted cameras in many competitive sports, it is important to note that they interviewed participants on the same day as the event to maximise recall (see also Houge Mackenzie & Kerr, 2012). This approach is promising in terms of collecting recent data about flow experiences while maximising richness and depth through the use of event-focused interviews.

The flow-peak performance relationship suggests that athletes who achieve outstanding results in competition are more likely (although not guaranteed) to have experienced flow (Jackson & Roberts, 1992). The elite level also presents opportunities to identify exceptional performances due to well-publicised competitive events (e.g., with results available online), and highly skilled athletes are suggested to be more likely to experience flow (Jackson, 1996).Therefore, by identifying exceptional performances in elite sport, it could be possible to purposively sample athletes who are more likely to have recently experienced flow. These athletes could then be interviewed about that specific experience in order to obtain “experience-near” data of flow, and reduce/avoid the possibility of collecting data about events which may have occurred up to years in the past (as can be the case in career-based interviews). This event-focused approach would arguably aid recall (Reis & Gable, 2000), reduce the limitations of career-based interviews and generate more trustworthy data. This approach could also lead to new insights into flow, such as the chronological sequence of its occurrence - which Pentland (1999) considered to be a “key organising device” in developing an explanation (p. 712).

Furthermore, the individual, self-paced, and stop-start nature of golf (Singer, 2002) means that golfers can recall the shots they hit as well as their thoughts and emotions during the periods of time between shots. Thus, golfers are in a good position to reconstruct performances in sequence and detail compared to athletes from other activities (e.g.,

externally-paced or team sports). While flow in golf has previously been explored in elite (Author 1 et al, 2012b, 2014, in press) and recreational players (Catley & Duda, 1997), no studies have yet employed such an event-focused approach. Therefore, in this study we aimed to purposively sample elite golfers after exceptional performances and interview them as soon as possible after the event to identify whether the players had experienced flow in that specific performance, and if so, to explore their perceptions regarding its occurrence. In turn, we sought to maximise the accuracy and detail of data on flow occurrence, address limitations of the traditional interview approach, and answer calls for refined methods for studying flow in sport (Jackson & Kimiecik, 2008).

Method

Design and Approach

This study was grounded in a critical realist ontology (Easton, 2010). Critical realism implies the triangulation of multiple data sources, as a form of retroduction, moving from empirical experiences to hypothesise and test underlying causal mechanisms, which are emergent in nature (Downward & Mearman, 2007). Furthermore, explanation lends itself to the in-depth study of a few cases or a relatively small sample of individuals, and to forms of data that retain the chronological and contextual connections between events (Maxwell, 2012). Generally, case study research provides rich, empirical descriptions of particular instances of phenomena with emphasis on the real-world context in which they occur (Yin, 2014), and is useful for answering ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Schwandt, 1997). Multiple-case studies enable comparisons that clarify whether findings are simply idiosyncratic to a single case or consistently replicated by several cases (Stake, 2006). These comparisons facilitate broader exploration of research questions with the potential to yield more robust, testable findings (i.e., in comparison to single-case studies; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Therefore, we based this study on a multiple-case study design to explore how and why flow

occurred in specific, recent golf performances. This design enabled us to use within-case analysis which retained chronological and contextual detail in each case, as well as cross-case comparisons to identify patterns and consistencies in the participants' experiences (see Analysis). Furthermore, a key principle in case study research is the use of multiple data sources (Yin, 2014), and we employed a mixed-method approach in order to collect richer and stronger evidence than could be achieved using one method alone (Moran, Matthews & Kirby, 2011).

Participants

Participants in this study were 10 male professional golfers[1] (see Table 1). Stake (2006) recommended that multiple-case studies should employ between four and 10 cases to optimise the benefits of this approach. Four players had competed full-time on the European Tour[2] (*M* = 8 seasons; range = 1-23), of whom two had won European Tour events. Two players had competed full-time on the Challenge Tour (*M* = 6 seasons), with nine Challenge Tour wins between them. Two participants had previously won tournaments on the Europro Tour (*n* = 4), and one player was formerly the number-one ranked amateur golfer in the world. Therefore, these participants were considered to be 'competitive-elite' and 'successful-elite' athletes based on the criteria outlined by Swann, Moran and Piggott (2015). Male participants were sampled because the authors had more access to men's tournaments than those on women's professional tours (see below).

Definition and Bounding of Cases

[1] Note: Two participants had outstanding performances in two separate tournaments and were therefore interviewed twice. Thus, 10 participants were involved in the study but 12 interviews took place.

[2]The European Tour is the highest standard of professional golf in Europe and one of the major tours worldwide involving world-class playing standards (www.europeantour.com). The Challenge Tour is the second tier of professional golf in Europe, used as a training ground for promotion to the European Tour. The Europro Tour is the third tier of professional golf in Europe through which players can graduate to the Challenge Tour (www.europrotour.com). The Senior Tour is the main tour for competitors over 50 years of age in Europe.

The cases of interest were specific and recent flow states experienced by elite golfers. Due to the elusive nature of these states, we sought to maximise the likelihood of capturing recent accounts of flow by pursuing certain criteria which bounded the cases (Yin, 2014). First, flow was more likely to be experienced during peak performances due to the close association between these two constructs (e.g., Jackson & Roberts, 1992). Therefore, we considered the final group (i.e., leaders) in the last round of professional tournaments to have the best chance of winning the event and in turn were more likely to achieve a peak performance. Being in contention to win was also expected to present the challenging conditions that produce flow; while players who shot the lowest score of the day or tournament were considered more likely to have performed close to (if not at) their peak. We judged performances satisfying these criteria to be suitable for data collection (see Table 1 for case selection rationale for each player). While these assumptions did not guarantee the identification of flow, they represented the most predictable situations in which flow was likely to occur within a tournament.

Recruitment

To recruit participants, the first author attended 11 tournaments on the European Tour (i.e., Final Qualifying for The Open), Challenge Tour, Senior Tour, and Europro Tour. These tournaments were chosen based on playing standard and access (i.e., location). Men's tournaments were sampled because no women's events at a comparable standard were easily accessible during the data collection period. The lead investigator attended tournaments until the intended total of 10 participants was sampled (in accordance with Stake, 2006). Of the eleven tournaments attended, a player from the final group won in seven of the events and these players were approached after the round with an invitation to take part in the study. For the remaining five interviews, the researcher monitored leader boards to identify other players who had achieved similar outstanding performances (e.g., the lowest round of the

tournament). Four players were approached in person after the round, and one was contacted through his management agency. When approaching players, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked if they would be interested in being interviewed about their performance in that tournament.

Data Collection

Ethical approval for the study was granted by an ethics committee at a British university. We employed mixed-methods in this study to obtain a more in-depth account of the performances which were deemed most likely to be conducive to flow by using: (i) direct observations; (ii) performance data; and (iii) interviews. In keeping with principles of case study research, information was collected from these multiple sources with the aim of corroborating findings (Yin, 2014). In this study, corroboration referred to whether the player had experienced flow, and if so, at what specific stages of the performance it occurred (e.g., specific shots or holes). We used the observation and performance data for each player to develop individualised probes within semi-structured interviews, which were then used as the primary data source[3].

Direct observations. At each tournament that the lead author attended, the last group, which typically comprised of two players (i.e., the leaders), was observed for the final round on the assumption that those players were most likely to win and therefore experience an exceptional performance. In these direct observations we sought to understand the context of each golfer's performance by focusing on factors such as their behaviour, weather conditions, shot/hole difficulty, potential distractions (e.g., crowds), and the actual shots they hit - all of which could influence the likelihood of the player winning and/or experiencing flow. The observations were collected as verbal field notes recorded via Dictaphone while the lead

[3] Examples of the observation transcripts, performance data, and individualised interview schedules are available from the lead author upon request.

author followed each group. Through these observations the researcher was able to identify key incidents, reflections, and questions from the performance which could be explored during interviews. These field notes were later transcribed and analysed.

Performance data. A performance monitoring tool was developed for this study (see supplementary data) which we used to: (i) record each shot taken by the players during their round; (ii) log the performances and act as a reminder for the researcher afterwards; and (iii) indicate peaks and troughs in the player's performance which may have represented periods when they may have been in, or closer to, flow. These data were collected during the performance in addition to the verbally-recorded observations (above), and were also used to develop player-specific probes. Furthermore, available scores and statistics were collected from score boards and websites (i.e., from each tour) after the performance. These were used primarily for players who could not be observed directly (e.g., players who won but were not in the final group).

Interviews. To develop a deeper understanding of the observation and performance data, we used interviews to gain an account of the performance from the player's perspective. These interviews were conducted as soon after the performance as possible, while still 'fresh' in the participant's memory (range = same day to 7 days later; $M = 4$ days). We employed a semi-structured approach to allow participants to elaborate and develop areas of perceived importance. While addressing general themes, specific probing questions were prepared for each player based on the other data sources, such as "Can you describe what it was like to be five under par through seven holes?" Further, the interviewer adopted a conversational and open-ended approach in order to develop rapport and allow new themes and discussions to emerge (cf. Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Before the interview began, the researcher encouraged players to challenge and clarify any assumptions or terminology used which did not correspond with their experiences.

First, flow was introduced and defined using the procedure used within recent research on flow in elite golf (Author 1 et al., 2014, 2015). Players were asked if they were familiar with the term *flow*, and to provide an example of such a state which stood out in their memory. The interviewer then judged whether or not they were referring to flow (as defined by the research team[4]). All examples from these players were judged to refer to flow, and after establishing familiarity with the concept, they were asked if they had experienced the same state during the recent performance for which they were sampled. Seven participants reported that they had experienced flow in that performance, and were then asked to describe the state which was again compared to the definition employed by the research team (above). All of these descriptions used terminology which corresponded with previous descriptions of flow, referred to specific dimensions of flow, and were therefore deemed relevant to the study.

Then participants were asked to: (i) specify at which stage in the round/tournament it occurred and how long it lasted; (ii) describe the shots and holes before, during, and after the period in which flow was identified; (iii) and discuss what they were thinking and feeling before, during, and after the flow state. If the player did not report experiencing flow, they were asked to describe the performance and reflect on why flow had not occurred (e.g., by making comparisons to the example they drew upon at the beginning of the interview). Specific probes were used to encourage these reflections, such as "what would have needed to happen at that point for flow to occur?"

The interviews were conducted which mainly took place in the clubhouse of the player's home golf club. All participants provided written consent after the researcher

[4] This definition was based upon awareness of those used by researchers previously (Jackson & Csikszentmihayi, 1999), definitions used in previous studies (Jackson, 1995, 1996), and athletes' quotes describing flow in previous research (Author 1 et al., 2014; Jackson, 1996).

explained the purpose of the study. Interviews were conducted face to face and lasted, on average, 61 minutes (*SD* = 14.9). Each interview was digitally recorded and was later transcribed verbatim, while brief notes were also taken.

Analysis

A team approach, employing all four authors, was used to guide the analysis. Data were analysed using a two-stage process as recommended in multiple-case study literature (e.g., Stake, 2006). First, within-case analysis was conducted to become familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity, which allowed the unique patterns of each case to emerge (i.e., regarding how flow had occurred for each player individually; Eisenhardt, 1989). The first author, who collected the data, enhanced his familiarity with it through a process of "in-dwelling" (e.g., by reading and re-reading the transcripts; Maykut & Morehouse, 1996). Preliminary analysis of the observation and performance data was conducted to develop player-specific probes for the interviews. This process involved identifying key stages of each player's performance, or events (such as a good shot or holed putt) which could have influenced flow occurrence. After the interviews were conducted, the transcripts were then searched for quotes which described the experience of flow, and key events or factors during the performance which led to its occurrence. By triangulating against the observation and performance data, it was possible to note the specific stage in the round at which those events/factors occurred (e.g., which hole the player was on) in order to understand the chronological and contextual connections between those events which produced flow (Maxwell, 2012). Detailed write-ups were made for each case, in which the relevant quotes were used to generate initial codes (see Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Once the data for each participant, and their individual accounts of flow (or its absence) had been collated, cross-case analysis was conducted (Stake, 2006). This process forces researchers to search for similarities and differences between cases in order to

recognise patterns and relationships among constructs (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Stake, 2006) – in this case, consistencies in the occurrence and experience of flow. Specifically, the write-ups for each case were compared to identify similarities and patterns, that is, the extent to which the same codes were present, and whether they occurred in a similar order. This process revealed consistent factors (i.e., themes) involved in the occurrence of these states, as well as the specific sequence in which they were present (see Results). Consistent codes were categorised and defined as higher-order themes which represented the players' experiences and the processes through which they occurred. Finally, those themes were reviewed for consistency and transparency (e.g., using the trustworthiness processes outlined below; see Braun & Clarke, 2006). The players are referred to by randomly chosen pseudonyms.

Quality and Trustworthiness

Various approaches have been proposed to judge the quality and authenticity of case study research (e.g., Yin, 2014; Stake, 1995). Generally, the term *trustworthiness* has been used by qualitative researchers to describe methods aiming to ensure quality in their work and as this case study was based primarily on qualitative data (i.e., the interviews), a number of steps were taken to establish trustworthiness according to Bassey's (2003) checklist. First, observing participants before conducting interviews enabled *prolonged engagement* with the performance of interest during data collection, and by continuing this process for 10 participants (the maximum for this research design according to Stake, 2006), we attempted to achieve *persistent observation of emerging issues.* In addition, we used *triangulation* of data in an attempt to corroborate findings (e.g., whether the participant experienced flow) and develop more specific/analytical questions within the interviews through individualised probes. Through these individualised interviews we attempted to obtain a *thorough account* of the player's experience, which is conveyed using direct quotes below. An *audit trail* was also used to record instrument development (e.g., for the monitoring tool), data collection,

triangulation, and interpretation of data. This audit trail was reviewed by two independent researchers who had extensive experience in qualitative and mixed-methods research. These researchers agreed that the study's inferences were logical, that the findings were grounded in the data, and that the study followed suitable processes.

Peer debrief was also conducted throughout the study, in that the second, third and fourth authors provided on-going guidance on the research process, reviewed data, and challenged the researcher's assumptions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For example, a number of conversations debated the best way of coding themes, as well as the most suitable labels for these themes (i.e., did the label accurately reflect the content?). This process took place via formal meetings between all members of the research team, and regular informal discussions with each member. While peer debrief was concerned primarily with the on-going *process* of collecting and analysing the data, participant reflections were sought to critique and provide feedback about the *results* of these processes (Maxwell, 2012). Engaging in dialogue with the participants was seen as an opportunity for elaboration, affirmation, and disagreement, in order to enhance credibility. This dialogue centred on the fairness, appropriateness, and believability of the researchers' interpretations of the data and analysis as a form of member-checking (Maxwell, 2012). Participants were provided with their verbatim transcript and a copy of the preliminary analysis. They were asked if the themes and categories made sense, and whether the overall account was realistic and resonant with their experiences. Due to elite nature of this sample, who were often in the country for short periods with busy schedules, this process took place via email. No modifications to the results or analysis resulted.

Results

In this study we aimed to better understand the occurrence and experience of flow in elite golf by interviewing players within a week of an exceptional performance in order to

obtain “experience near” data. These players reported experiencing two different psychological states during their excellent performances; although they used similar terminology to describe their experiences (e.g., referring to both states as “the zone”; see Table 2). Martin was conscious of, and able to distinguish between both states: “It’s the same zone but it’s a different mind-set… One of them is a more relaxed state of mind than a more intense ‘[being] in the zone’… but they’re both as good as each other.” These states were described as “letting it happen” and “making it happen”, as illustrated by Jack: “Sometimes what they say is “just let it happen”... getting your mind to where it doesn’t hurt you; to where it doesn’t think… [and] it doesn’t have the questions… But then… sometimes I’ll say “let’s make it happen” where it ups your focus”. Specifically, six players reported experiencing *letting it happen* while four described *making it happen.* One golfer did not report either state, and two players only reported micro-states (i.e., only for one shot, or in one aspect of their game; see Table 2). Furthermore, each of these states occurred through different processes. In the following sections we describe the occurrence and experience of both states, before they are compared in terms of similarities and differences.

“Letting it Happen”: Flow State

Occurrence. The state of “letting it happen” closely resembled previous descriptions of flow (see Table 3). This state was described by quotes such as: “I just relaxed and let it happen instead of forcing the issue” (Martin), and its occurrence was summarised by Jack:

> You get so focused on the process and staying in the present and focusing on what you want to do with the golf ball, then that can help you click into it… You start hitting some good shots… and your confidence rises up a little bit… And when you have that confidence you can just get in the zone and start making everything… it’s just a ton of confidence.

Flow occurrence began with a *positive event* in the performance, such as holing an important putt, making a birdie, hitting a good shot, or getting a good feeling in their swing: "you hit one [shot] and something clicks and you know that's what you should do every time… I just knew after that one [shot] that this is what feels good today and I was able to reproduce that for the rest of the round" (Shane). The players' confidence increased after this positive event which, in turn, helped them produce a similarly good result in their next shot. By repeating this cycle, the players developed *confidence and momentum*, including David:

> I stepped up… [to] my first tee shot of the day, and striped it down the middle. That was it; that was my confidence back with driving because I knew if I could do it once I could repeat it again and again. And then… I made a good up and down… on my third hole… so I felt my chipping and short game was good. Then... I holed the putt on my fifth or sixth hole for birdie, so "okay, the putter's going well"… [That] was kind of how it builds up... It's like it snowballs… your confidence grows and grows.

The process above continued until the players became *totally confident* in their game and in how the performance was progressing. For example, in reference to the quote above, David described that "all of a sudden it's like 'well my game feels good!'" Similarly:

> I was just confident in pretty much everything… It was kind of a feeling like "well there's not really too much in my way right now, everything's going my way," and I just felt like I can shoot the lights out… My swing was beginning to feel good and… I liked the holes coming up, I knew I could play well (Alex).

This perception also seemed to involve an awareness of what a "good score" was, and the player's potential to reach it. In turn, this involved a sense of exceeding certain expectations:

> There's a point when you can go like four under, five under for the round which a lot of people are going to shoot; once you start going six, seven (under) then not a lot of people are going to get up there (Ian)

Once the players reached this point of total confidence, and were aware that they could perform well, they appraised the situation to be a *challenge.* For example, David reported how "that's when you start sort of challenging yourself", and Alex described that "I wanted to keep making sure I did the right things... I really wanted to try and... test yourself [sic] in a way, you know, challenge yourself to do it in the most pressure-packed situation". After they perceived the situation to be challenging, these players pursued *open-ended goals* which did not have a fixed outcome. To illustrate, Alex reported that: "I'm at the top [of the leader board]; all I'm thinking about is… trying to go forward, trying to get further in front… It's the kind of one-sighted vision that I had to go further ahead." Similarly, "I was just trying to get it [my score] lower, trying to hit it closer and hole the putts... I just saw going lower, keep going lower" (Martin).

Experiencing Flow. Being totally confident and pursuing challenging, open-ended goals led these players into flow. Interestingly, Martin described being aware of the point at which he entered flow during this process:

> I was three under [par] after nine [holes], and then… [hit] a really good second shot in close, and… walking up to the green, seeing it sort of 4 feet away, I was kind of walking into that sort of zone where I was just playing, just relaxed and playing.

Similarly, the players described positive feedback with phrases commonly associated with flow, such as feeling like "nothing can go wrong… you feel things going your way" (Alex), and "everything seems to fall into place" (Lee). The players also reported a relaxed concentration on the task at hand: "I think it's just something that happens naturally… I'm concentrating aren't I, that's for sure - you can't be in the zone and not concentrating - but it's just something that seems to happen" (Lee). These players also experienced absorption in the performance:

> All we carried on doing was just trying to take one shot at a time… the same routine for every single shot: stood back, picked the yardage, picked the club, picked the shot, picked the target again, hit the shot… I've come off the 18th, looked at my caddy and said "what score have I shot?" Because I didn't know… I just knew I made a birdie, made a par, made another birdie, but never added it up… I was like "How are we doing?"… and he's like "yeah, we're doing all right, we're leading!"

The players described altered cognitive and kinaesthetic perceptions, including tunnel vision, feeling stronger, and feeling less tired afterwards, as well as absence of negative thoughts: "I didn't have any negative thoughts – everything I saw was positive" (Martin). Other main themes included being calm/relaxed ("you're comfortable, you're calm, you're relaxed"; Lee), as well as sense of control, automaticity and a sense of ease/effortless performance, time transformation, and enjoyment (see Table 3).

"Making it Happen"

Occurrence. The second state was characterised by quotes such as: "[when] you have no choice… If you're going to win you *have* to shoot this score" (Jack), and "when you're fully... aware of what the situation was... [and being in] control of the situation" (Nick). , Oliver described what this state was like: "when the pressure's on, when I'm in the heat of battle…and when I get that feeling inside me, that's when I play my best golf...all I feel is different is that it really matters." The occurrence of this state began with the player becoming *aware of the situation* that they were in and realising what was required of them. For example, they described: "realising you've only got a two shot lead... with two [holes] to play" (Oliver); and "It's the evaluation of the situation… I walked towards the tee and saw that leader board and knew the situation… I saw I was one clear and... then I knew my job" (David). This realisation commonly occurred after the player saw a leader board, but could also occur through their own reflections: "Walking to the [next] tee, it just dawned on me that

I was seven under and I had three holes to play, and... that's when it kicked in and I thought "this could be my best ever score"" (Ian).

After becoming aware of the situation, the players identified structured, *fixed goals* that they needed to pursue in order to achieve the desired outcome. For example, Oliver reported that: "There's only two shots between me and the next guy, so now there's a goal there, to finish with two pars… There was like a target at the end that you had to produce." These goals were very specific in that they involved a fixed outcome (e.g., winning the tournament), with definite requirements in order to achieve them (e.g., making two pars), which were usually over a certain period of the performance (e.g., the final two holes): "I knew the job, if I finished par, par, par, I was going to win the golf tournament. So that was... like the mini-goal I then gave myself... and I did win the golf tournament" (David). Furthermore, these goals were usually imminent, in that they became important at the end of the round or tournament.

Awareness of the situation and fixed goals led to a *challenge appraisal* for these players: "I only had three holes left of the tournament to play… the three [most] important holes… This was it, this was my time now. This is where I can win" (David). These appraisals occurred even when such reactions seemed unlikely. For example, one player double-bogeyed the 15th hole when leading in the last round of a tournament, yet:

> I evaluated the situation... If someone said to you "you're leading by one… with three holes left to play to win a golf tournament", you'd take that every day of the week… So what bad thing could I possibly have to think about at that point?… I genuinely couldn't lose. And the reason I felt like that is because I had the belief in myself… I had the ability to be able to assess the situation properly… [and] came to a logical conclusion, which was [that] I was one shot clear (David).

Hence, a key factor influencing these challenge appraisals was the golfers' confidence that they could meet the challenge they were facing and, in turn, achieve their goal. Indeed, Jack described how self-talk was helpful in maintaining such confidence under pressure:

> I'd be like "okay let's just hit this fairway, one shot at a time, let's stay in the present, you can do this, just take it easy, calm it down, breathe, don't worry about it, it's just a golf shot, go execute it. You can do it"… Anything to add that little bit of confidence.

Subsequently, these players reported that their *concentration increased* in response to that challenge appraisal:

> It's the end of the round, end of the tournament, I'm leading by two… so I knew that I had to concentrate and be in the zone… to finish it off… That just made me step up the concentration and get me… more in the zone (Oliver).

Indeed, the players suggested that their concentration was at its height during this stage: "It definitely reached its peak… literally it was at its height… I don't think I could have concentrated any more" (David).

Experiencing "Making it happen". The resulting state was characterised by heightened focus towards the achievement of fixed goals, and more effortful concentration on the task at hand: "I made myself focus even more on that last hole... I was trying a little bit harder to be intense" (Ian). Indeed, participants described feeling intense and nervous during the experience: "[When it's] closer to the end… that's when I start thinking about it a little bit more I definitely get more nervous… It definitely intensifies" (Jack). This state was also reported to be purposeful and effortful: "I knew standing on the 17th I needed to finish birdie-birdie for second… [and] it felt like I was trying more to get in that zone" (Ian). David also reported being confident: "I… feel like I couldn't hit a bad shot in that situation… I was in the moment, I could hit the shot, and I hit the shot. It's as simple as that". Indeed, the golfers

who experienced this state reported being intrinsically motivated, even in the final holes of tournaments with the opportunity to win substantial financial (i.e., extrinsic) reward:

> Even though I knew the importance of the shots, I couldn't wait to hit [each] shot… because I… wanted the satisfaction of hitting it out of the middle of the golf club, hitting that perfect shot to the green. That's what I was sort of striving for then, so it wasn't just about… winning the tournament, it was about hitting the perfect shots at the time as well (David).

Absorption was also described as part of this state: "it just feels like I'm so focused and nothing else is around me... it's just me and the ball… that's it, I don't think about anything else... nothing else was happening as far as I was concerned" (Ian). Altered cognitive and kinaesthetic perceptions were also reported in terms feeling stronger, hitting the ball further, and "everything around me is just a blur, I can't hear or see anything else – it's just me" (Oliver). Indeed, David described loss of memory:

> [I saw] a few of the pictures from the final hole [afterwards], and I was like "I can't remember any of that!"… The thing that really stuck in my mind was that… the camera man was almost in my face… but I didn't notice. [I] didn't even notice the camera man was there! [I] didn't notice anything going on around me (David).

Furthermore, enjoyment of the experience, optimal arousal, and *time transformation* ("looking back on it yeah it did go pretty quick"; Oliver) were reported, as was a sense of control: "I just felt in control of everything… it felt like I had complete control of myself and my emotions" (David; see Table 4).

"Letting it Happen" vs. "Making it Happen": Similarities and Differences

Goals pursued. A consistent difference between these two states (i.e., present in every case), was the nature of the goals that the players pursued (see Table 5). When *making it happen,* their goals involved fixed demands, time frames, and outcomes: "If I finished par,

par, par, I was going to win the golf tournament" (David). Conversely flow involved less structured, open-goals, such as "trying to get further in front" (Alex). Therefore, *making it happen* appeared to involve more structured and fixed demands (i.e., they either won or they did not), whereas flow was more exploratory and self-referenced, involving a sense of 'seeing how well I can do.'

Performance context. The state that these players entered was influenced by variables within the performance, such as the stage of the round, stage of the tournament, and their position in the tournament. *Making it happen* occurred more suddenly, in response to realising the demands of a situation, and players experienced this state towards the end of the round. Conversely, *letting it happen* occurred more gradually and was reported to begin during the early and middle stages of the round. Indeed, players articulated how the stage of the round could lead to differences in their approach: "At the start of the round and during the middle you're just playing – see[ing] what it gives you" (Oliver).

For these players, *making it happen* occurred when they were trying to win (i.e., at the end of the final round), whereas *letting it happen* was reported during all stages of the tournament. To illustrate, the players perceived that each round of the tournament encompassed its own objectives:

> The first round… [you're] just trying to shoot a decent score, give yourself a chance in the tournament. Second round's making the cut or pressing on, and then you've got your [final] round where you're trying to win or...finish as high as you can (Phil).

Furthermore, the players attached different levels of importance to the final rounds compared to the last. For example, David reported that on "the first two days you can get yourself in contention but you can't actually win it then… (so) in all reality it doesn't matter… the final round is the time when you can win the golf tournament." Similarly, the early rounds were reported to be much more relaxed: "The first two rounds are so… relaxed… there's no real

pressure... (I) just try and do what I can control and see how the score pans out really" (Phil). As a result, the players explained that their concentration changed during the course of the tournament: "I was probably more focused on my own performance in the first and second [rounds], but then by the end of the tournament you're more aware of your position" (Nick). Such self-referenced focus was more conducive to *letting it happen*, whereas *making it happen* was more relevant at the end of the tournament when the players' focus switched to the outcome and their position.

A final factor was the player's position in the tournament, and in particular, whether or not they were in contention to win. In the final round these players reported that they tried harder: "you're in contention to win the tournament, so yeah… you're trying like hell!" (Lee). Similarly, Martin suggested that "there's more pressure on winning as opposed to shooting nine under." *Make it happen* was therefore more likely to occur once the player was in contention to win or achieve a personal best score, whereas *letting it happen* seemed to occur regardless of whether the player was in contention or not (again, because it was more self-referenced and less dependent on external factors). Figure 1 summarises the occurrence of each state relative to the performance context.

Relationships with elevated performance. All players reported performing at their peak during both states, including Lee: "to be in the zone you've got to be playing well, that's the key... I think that's the zone really, playing at your true potential." Consistent differences emerged regarding the direction of the flow-performance relationship between states. When *making it happen*, the players reported "stepping up" their performance and "raising their game" to meet the demands of the challenging situation. The players' response to those demands improved their performance - that is, the state led to improved performance:

> In general play, I feel like if you hit a good shot… it goes roughly where you're aiming, you're fairly pleased… but when I'm fully concentrating [in the zone] I feel

> that normally it goes exactly where I'm aiming… I just feel like my shots are so much better. Even putting. (Oliver)

Conversely, flow occurred via a "build-up" of performing well (see above); that is, good performance led to flow: "I played my way into the zone… You've got to that point by hitting good shots" (Martin).

Discussion

In this study we aimed to better understand the occurrence and experience of flow in elite golf by interviewing players within a week of an exceptional performance in order to obtain "experience near" data. Rather than solely experiencing flow, the primary finding was that these players experienced two different subjective states during their excellent performances. "Letting it happen" corresponded with the definition and conceptualisation of flow (e.g., Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999), and although some characteristics were common to both states, "making it happen" appeared to be somewhat different to flow. In the following sections we discuss these findings in relation to existing flow research, as well as attempting to understand and conceptualise "making it happen" within the wider literature on optimal psychological states in sport.

"Letting it happen": Flow

Letting it happen was described as a calm state with a focus on the shot at hand, absence of negative thoughts, perceptions of ease and automaticity in the performance, sense of control, enjoyment, and feeling like nothing could go wrong. These themes correspond closely to the common conceptualisation of flow (e.g., Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). These players also described a process through which this state occurred, which seemingly involved a relatively gradual and consistent build-up with some broad overlaps with the flow conditions (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) in terms of high perceived challenge and skills (i.e., build-up of confidence), positive feedback, and goals. It is important to note that

the goals for these players were very specific in that they encompassed the challenge of discovery and exploration (e.g., “seeing how well I can do”). Therefore, it could be the case that this specific type of goal is important for flow occurrence, and that the dimension “clear goals” could be refined if these findings are supported elsewhere. Momentum also appeared to be particularly important in the build-up of flow. This construct has previously been identified as a facilitator of flow in elite golf (Author 1 et al, 2012b, in press), and the process described in “letting it happen” displays similarities with Taylor and Demick’s (1994) Multidimensional Model of Momentum which involves a “momentum chain” beginning with a “precipitating event.” Therefore, this model may provide a useful template for flow occurrence, and for these players, momentum emerged as an important condition for flow.

Flow is considered to be elusive and unpredictable, with most knowledge to date based on factors facilitating or associated with its occurrence. The findings of this study have contributed new and refined insights into the conditions for its occurrence, as well as tentatively identifying a process through which it appeared to occur for these players. These findings could therefore represent a step towards the development of an explanation for flow in elite golf.

“Making it Happen”

The state described as “making it happen” shared a number of characteristics with flow, including enjoyment, sense of control, absorption, and confidence. However in contrast to flow, “making it happen” was described as a more intense state of optimal arousal, with heightened and effortful concentration, and awareness of the situation (e.g., of the score and position in the tournament). These characteristics do not resonate with common descriptions of flow which is instead considered to be effortless, automatic, with little awareness of the situation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). This state occurred in situations similar to the definition of clutch performance, that is, when an athlete is aware that

they are performing in a challenging situation, care about the outcome, has the capacity to experience stress about that situation, and succeeds primarily due to skill (see Hibbs, 2010 for full definition and conceptual analysis). This definition of clutch performance focuses on the outcome rather than the subjective experience, and therefore may describe the conditions for "making it happen" but not the resulting subjective experience. Indeed, there appears to be scant qualitative descriptions of athlete's experiences of clutch performance to date. Hence, "making it happen" does not appear to be fully described by flow or clutch performance.

Other researchers have explored the state of peak performance: an episode of superior functioning resulting in optimal performance outcomes that exceeded prior standards of performance (Privette, 1983). However, qualitative descriptions of peak performance refer to automatic, effortless execution of performance (Anderson et al, 2014; Cohn, 1991) which differs to the effortful, purposeful, and intense state described by these players. Therefore, "making it happen" does not appear to be fully described by peak performance either.

An alternative interpretation of these findings can be drawn from leisure and adventure activities, in which researchers have integrated the flow perspective with reversal theory (Apter, 2001). Houge Mackenzie et al (2011) qualitatively distinguished between paratelic flow states (playful and defined by the absence of salient and/or important outcome goals) and telic flow (more serious and characterised by the presence of specific, important outcome goals). Their participants' descriptions of telic flow appear similar to "making it happen" in terms of optimal arousal (feeling calm yet energised), intensity, and heightened focus on the achievement of outcome goals. Therefore, one interpretation could be that "letting it happen" and "making it happen" are two different types of *flow* state. However, it remains that characteristics such as intensity, heightened awareness, and effortful performance do not appear to correspond with the definition or dimensions of flow according to Csikszentmihalyi, and therefore this interpretation could be questioned.

Regardless of the terms used to describe this state, it is important to note that a second subjective state appeared to underlie the excellent performances of these golfers. While flow provided one perspective on excellent performances in golf, “make it happen” also appeared to be highly relevant and important for this sample. These findings require testing and dedicated attempts at ‘falsification’ (Popper, 1959). However, if corroborated (e.g., across other activities) they could provide a refined understanding of the psychological states and processes underlying exceptional performances in sport.

Comparing Both States

In the present study, a consistent difference between both states was the nature of goals that the players pursued. These goals were similar to those reported in studies suggesting two types of flow (Houge Mackenzie et al, 2011) in that *make it happen* involved a fixed outcome, whereas *let it happen* was more exploratory with an absence of a fixed outcome. Indeed, when *letting it happen* the players reported pursuing goals which were self-referenced and challenging (e.g., “how well can I do?”), yet seemed deliberately avoidant of outcome. These open-goals differed from “do your best” goals (Locke & Latham, 2006) which do not encompass the exploratory element of “seeing how well I can do.” Therefore, these open-goals may warrant further exploration (e.g., in relation to creativity).

It could also be the case that different types of challenge are encountered within performances which require pursuit of these types of goal. For example, in his original work on flow, Csikszentmihalyi (1975) distinguished between activities that involve *creativity*, *problem-solution,* and *competition.* Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi suggested that challenges can be of two types: the challenge of the unknown, which requires discovery and exploration; and the more concrete challenge of competition. He argued that flow involves “a stretching of one’s self toward new dimensions of skill and competence” (1975, p.33) which again can be measured either: (i) against the boundaries of one’s own competence, or (ii) by competition.

Therefore, more specific conceptualisation of the challenge and clear goals dimensions of flow could help researchers better understand the nature of flow occurrence and the experience of “making it happen.”

It appears that the similarities and differences between cases were influenced by the performance context. The stage of the round, stage of the tournament, and player’s position in the tournament combined to influence the goals that they pursued (i.e., open or fixed) and subsequently the state that they experienced. Players were more likely to *make it happen* towards the end of their performance when an important outcome was at stake (e.g., winning). Conversely, *flow* was typically experienced earlier in the performance when there was more opportunity for momentum and confidence to build. Koehn and Morris (2014) examined performance context by comparing flow across training and competition; however with these findings we suggest that it is important to understand how the context within a specific performance (i.e., training *or* competition) can influence both flow and “making it happen”.

Methodological Discussion

It could be the case that ‘career-based’ interviews used previously have been unable to identify the subtle differences reported here. For example, athletes may have ‘blurred’ their recall of these states into description of one flow state, or researchers may have coded the data from both states as one type of experience. By adopting an event-focused approach, it was possible to collect data from flow states soon after they had occurred (ranging from the same day to one week later). In turn, the players were able to recall in detail the chronology of their performances and, in turn, the processes through which “letting it happen” and “making it happen” occurred. Therefore, in this study we have begun to answer calls for refined methods of studying flow in sport (Jackson & Kimiecik, 2008), and have generated insights into the nature of these states which, if supported elsewhere, could help build

towards an explanation of flow and “making it happen.”

Limitations and Future Directions

As with any study, there are limitations. In this study we have described the experiences of a specific sample of 10 elite male golfers. Single rather than repeat interviews were used with most participants, and it would have been valuable to conduct repeat interviews with all participants to explore other performances and possibly enable more critical discussion of the states identified (e.g., by making comparisons to other excellent results, or even average and poor performances). Research into the experiences of elite female golfers would add to these findings, while future studies could also explore different levels of expertise (e.g,. recreational golfers) and different types of sport (e.g., fast-paced, team sports). Similarly, other research avenues could lie in individual differences and whether, for example, athletes are more or less likely to enter either state.

We also focused on the initiation and experience of these states, meaning that future studies employing an event-focused approach should explore issues such as their management/maintenance (Author 1 et al, 2014), disruption/prevention (e.g., Jackson, 1995), and restoration (e.g., Chavez, 2008). Furthermore, as a means of conducting event-focused interviews in future, researchers could track longitudinally a number of athletes (e.g., over the course of a season) who report flow after it occurs and can then be interviewed. This event-focused approach could be an alternative method to ESM in sport which is not as random or disruptive, yet enables access to more than just one performance/experience (e.g., via repeat interviews). Finally, while we have presented our interpretations of the data, others could have coded them differently and may have arrived at alternative conclusions. Further research will enable better understanding of these ideas, which could lead to applied recommendations concerning, for example, how athletes and coaches can prepare for and manage each state during training and competition to optimise performance.

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Note: Four references have been removed to preserve the authors' anonymity

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Tables

Table 1: Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Professional experience (yrs)	Nationality	Case selection rationale
Alex	20	1	England	Won tournament on Europro Tour
David	26	3	England	Won tournament on Europro Tour
Lee	37	14	England	Won tournament on Europro Tour
Nick	52	34	Australia	Won tournament on Senior Tour
Oliver	23	2	England	Won tournament on Europro Tour
				Finished second in tournament on Europro Tour
Phil	25	5	England	Won tournament on Europro Tour
				Finished third in tournament on Europro Tour
Shane	24	1	USA	Won tournament on Europro Tour
Ian	39	17	England	Finished second in tournament on Europro Tour
Martin	28	8	England	First round leader in tournament on Europro Tour
Jack	23	1	USA	Qualified for The Open via Local Final Qualifying
Mean (SD)	30 (9.9)	9 (10.6)		

Table 2: Overview of players who experienced "letting it happen," "making it happen," or neither

	Player	Illustrative quote
Letting it happen	Alex	The last round… I was pretty zoned in [on the] front nine… That was just the perfect way to play golf
	David $_A$	On the Thursday, I had a putt… to go 10 [under par] for the tournament… everything was just flowing nicely… I did feel like I was sort of indestructible almost at that point
	Lee	The first round, yeah I think I kind of experienced a little bit of the zone… I wasn't fazed by anything, you know, I felt good. I think everything just seems to fit into place
	Ian $_A$	Yeah… yesterday was [in the zone]… [I shot] seven under.
	Martin	The times that I have been in it is obviously when my good rounds have been, i.e., on Wednesday when I shot eight under.
	Jack	I recently was just in it, at the qualifying. I posted seven under [par] on my back nine to shoot eight under [par in total], and I was definitely in the zone on that back nine.
Making it happen	Ian $_B$	I knew standing on the 17th I needed to finish birdie-birdie for second… [and] it felt like I was trying more to get in that zone
	Oliver $_1$	My lowest round really was two days ago… I shot ten under, course record… and I was definitely, definitely in the zone then
	Oliver $_2$	I knew that I had to concentrate and be in the zone… to finish it off… That just made me step up my concentration and get me…more in the zone
	David $_B$	I don't think I could have concentrated any more from 16 to 18… on 17… I literally think I stayed in the zone the whole time through that hole
Micro-states	Nick	I was really in the zone for that wedge shot and I got it close…I walked straight up to it, I knew exactly what I had to do and I pulled the club and I just hit it
	Shane	I was pretty close to being in the zone...[but just] on the greens
None	Phil$_1$	Last week…(I) just went about doing my own business, and wouldn't say I was in the zone
	Phil$_2$	Yeah I wasn't in the zone at all…I just don't think I was bothered enough

Note: $_{1,2}$ refer to different interviews held with the same player; $_{A, B}$ denote between different experiences in the same tournament (i.e., second round and final round for both players).

Table 3: Analysis of the occurrence and experience of "letting it happen"

	Themes	Codes	Example Quotes
Occurrence	Positive Event	Holing a putt	Holing an important putt; holing a long putt
		Making a birdie	It started with birdie
		Hitting a good shot	Hit a good shot off first tee, set tone for the day
		Get a good feeling in the swing	Something clicked in my swing
	Confidence and momentum builds	Develop momentum	Create snowball by hitting good shots and making birdies; I had momentum
		Confidence grows from hitting good shots	Confidence grows as momentum builds
			Confidence rises from hitting good shots
		Confidence in performance	Swing was starting to feel good
			Knew I could play well/score well
	Become totally confident	Total confidence	Confident in everything/all parts of game;
			Extra belief/confidence in yourself because of what's just happened
			Start firing at everything – know you're going to make it; Know before hitting it that it'll go in
	Challenge appraisal	Start challenging yourself	Start challenging yourself - "how low can I go?"
			Wanted to test/challenge myself in the most pressure-packed situation
	Pursue open-ended goals	Get further in front	Just go forward; get further in front
		Get another birdie	Get another birdie, then another, then another – I was so focused on getting next birdie
		Get further under par	Just trying to get it lower; when I got to 8 I wanted to get it to 9
Experience	"Letting it happen"	Positive feedback	Nothing could go wrong; working out unreal; felt indestructible
			Everything was comfortable; flowing nicely
		Absence of negative thoughts	Not worried about next shot
			Fear and doubt go down
			Didn't have negative thoughts
			Didn't feel pressure
		Relaxed concentration	So focused on the process and staying in the present
			I was concentrating well; 100% focused on what I was doing; mind never wandered
		Absorption	Didn't realise how many under par I was because so focused on making another birdie
		Calm/relaxed	Felt calm; relaxed
		Ease/automaticity	That was easy; the game felt easier to play
		Sense of control	Ball was under control
		Enhanced motivation	Couldn't wait to hit the next shot
		Enjoyment	Enjoying the situation
		Altered perceptions	Walk taller, stand stronger
			Tunnel vision
			Time went by quickly

Table 4: Analysis of the occurrence and experience of "making it happen"

	Themes	Codes	Example Quotes
Occurrence	Become aware of the situation	Saw leader-board and knew the situation	I saw on the leader-board that I was one clear, knew my job; knew the situation
		Situational demands	Knew only had two holes left; it's the end of the round, end of the tournament, leading by two
		Own realisation	Dawned on me that I could shoot my best ever score
	Identify fixed goals	Fixed goals	Finish par-par to win
			Finish birdie-birdie for second
			Finish with three birdies for best ever score
	Challenge appraisal	This is my time	This was my time; this is where I can win the tournament
			This is my time, two shot lead with six to play
		Challenging situations	It was like the heat of the battle
		Confidence	Had belief in myself; knew I was going to play well; knew I was going to win
			Didn't realise severity of the shot because I was confident in my ability
	Concentration increases	Peak of concentration	100% concentration
			Concentration definitely peaked; at its pinnacle
		Awareness of demands steps up concentration	Knew I had to concentrate; knowing what you have to do really steps up my concentration
		More intense focus	Made myself focus more; more intense focus
		Concentration on task at hand	Wasn't thinking anything other than hitting the shots and winning the tournament
Experience	"Making it happen"	Intensity of effort	Intensity levels are higher; feeling really intense to do it properly; trying harder to be more intense
		Absorption	Didn't notice anything going on around me; didn't notice the cameraman right in front of me
			Didn't take notice of surroundings - It's just me and the ball, nothing else is around me
		Enjoyment	You're enjoying it
		Enhanced motivation	Couldn't wait to hit the shots
			It wasn't just about winning, it was about hitting perfect shot; wanted satisfaction of hitting it out of the middle
			Concentrating on shooting my best ever score, wasn't thinking about first prize
		Sense of control	Felt in control of everything; complete control of self and emotions; in control of the ball all day
		Optimal arousal	Relaxed, calm; wasn't too pumped-up or excited
			Adrenaline in your body makes you hit it further; adrenaline was going; had butterflies; nervous
		Altered perceptions	Didn't hear much; can't see or hear much around me
			I was just seeing me and the flag, that was it
			Felt stronger; can hit the ball further
			Loss of memory - I can hardly remember; can remember hitting the shots but not the other normal details
			Happened very quickly; did go pretty quickly

Table 5: Examples of the different goals pursued in both states

State	Player	Goal
Make it happen	Jack	I figured before teeing off if I shoot 6 under I'll have a chance (of qualifying for The Open)…I was just so into that number, I'm like "okay let's just get to 6…6 under will get it done
	Oliver$_1$	I want to finish with three birdies for my best ever score
	Oliver$_2$	on the last two holes there's only two shots between me and the next guy, so now there's a goal there, to finish with two pars…to win…my first tournament
	David $_A$	If I finished par, par, par, I was going to win the golf tournament
	Ian	I knew standing on the 17th I needed to finish birdie-birdie for second
Let it happen	Alex	All I'm thinking about…trying to go forward, trying to get further in front…so I'd say it's the kind of one-sighted vision that I had to go further ahead
	David $_B$	You're just sort of…trying to go "right, how deep can I go?"
	Martin	I was kind of like "let's just see what happens"…It was just normal and "(let's) go see what I can do"… when I got it to 8 (under)…I just thought "just get more."

Note: $_{1,2}$ refer to different interviews held with Oliver; $_{A, B}$ denote between different experiences David had in the same tournament.

Figures

Figure 1: Summary of the occurrence and experience of both states reported